ALBUM SPECIAL

Roger Glover:

Purple's Japan smash

DEEP PURPLE: "Made In Japan" (Purple). Just like its magnificent predecessor "Machine Head", this double-album, which captures Deep Purple at their very best in the Land Of The Rising Sun, more than substantiates the undisputed truth that they're one of the few groups who have managed to combine creative intelligence with complex high-energy electric rock.

Following in the grand tradition of great British rock bands, the Purple Gang — perhaps, even more so than ELP — have in their own inimitable way extended the early experiments of the Nice. However, in no way are Deep Purple plagiarists, they are what they play, and that's the reason why they enjoy mass acceptance.

In fact, Purple have two major assets that the Nice lacked — an exceedingly professional full-lunged front man in Ian Gillan, and the greased-lightnin' digitial gymnastics of guitarist Richie Blackmore.

In many ways, a "live" album is the best media for any first-class road band to present their music. Even though there can be faults in balance and mix, you can still judge the band for what they're worth.

This particular album — worth double the price — will consolidate Purple's enviable position and convert many new fans.

Though each is a virtuoso, neither Jon Lord, Ian Paice, Roger Glover, Gillan or Blackmore allow their individual skills to get out of hand and detract from the collective performance.

You may have heard all seven cuts before — "Highway Star", "Child In Time", "Smoke On The Water", "The Mule", "Strange Kind Of Woman", "Lazy", and "Space Truckin'" before. But I guarantee you've never heard them played with such power, exhuberance and sheer confidence.

This power is largely boosted by the responsive audiences Purple played to in both Tokyo and Osaka. Indeed, half the enjoyment is in the two-way rapport between band and fan.

To Purple's credit you don't need to dissect every track, because they maintain such a high standard of performance throughout.

I detect a new-found funkiness in their intense drive. Jon Lord improves with each and every album — his keyboard dexterity is clear and precise even in the extremely fast passages. He disciplines himself, never allowing his playing to deteriorate into a meaningless jumble.

With brash confidence and showmanship, Richie Blackmore wields his axe, in a manner the makers didn't account for. He extracts a whole spectrum of dischordant effects and runs his fingers over the strings with incredible speed.

As a unit Glover and Paice come on strong, fortifying the front line and also having individual work outs. Little Ian's drumnastics on "The Mule" are much more than "just another" drum solo.

With such competition, one doesn't envy Ian Gillan's position as singer, yet it never becomes a pitched battle between who can sing/play louder than the other.

Gillan's delivery of "High Way Star", "Child In Time" and "Strange Kind Of Woman" elevates him to the exclusive front man fraternity of Stewart, Jagger, Rodgers, Plant, and Daltrey.

When reviewing albums, I always work on the maxim, "Would I Buy This Record". As far as Deep Purple's "Made In Japan" is concerned, I have no hesitation in saying YES.

ROY CARR